



Chapter 10

Pedagogical Approaches and Lived Experience of Teaching and Learning a First-Year Law Subject During the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa

Amanda Boniface¹ 

Faculty of Law,
University of Johannesburg 

Abstract

The lockdown due to Covid-19 in South Africa resulted in rapid forced changes to the teaching approach of universities. This chapter will focus on the experiences of lecturing to first-year Law of Persons and the Family students during the pandemic. It will also compare the difference in pedagogical approaches pre- and post-Covid-19 lockdown, drawing on almost a decade of lecturing the subject at the University of Johannesburg. A question that will be explored is: To what extent did the change in the pedagogical approach due to the Covid-19 pandemic work for first year students? To examine this question, literature from education experts will be briefly examined, as well as the lived experience of lecturers and students with regard to the subject Law of Persons and the Family as presented at the University of Johannesburg during the Covid-19 lockdown. Possible aspects to explore include firstly the support of first-year students; secondly, the use of technology in the learning sphere during the Covid-19 pandemic; thirdly, the opinions of education specialists about

¹ BLC, LLB, LLM, LLD. Associate professor in the Department of Private Law at the University of Johannesburg.

the pedagogical approaches used during the Covid-19 lockdown; and, lastly, the challenges faced by lecturers and students during the change in pedagogical approaches during the lockdown. The focus here will be on the subject Law of Persons and the Family and will not be overly comparative in nature. Under the first aspect, the supportive role played by the lecturers and tutors in the Law of Persons and the Family course will be examined. This will also link with the role played by technology to some extent; for example, the role that WhatsApp groups played in supporting our first-year students will be dealt with. The support system traditionally offered to first-year Law of Persons and the Family students was predominantly in person, with a smaller measure of online resources. This included an in-person orientation for all first-year students (across subjects). The change in the method of presenting the First Year Seminar will be explored, as well as the fact that students were not able to see their tutors or lecturers in person and use was made of online communication systems. The challenges experienced by the students and lecturers – such as data availability and access – will also be briefly mentioned. Additionally, the successes of pedagogical approaches and measures used during the lockdown period will also be discussed. For example, WhatsApp groups have been carried through to post-lockdown operations and are now used for each tutorial group. Aspects such as frequent online chat groups, messaging via WhatsApp groups, online tutorials and lectures, and the posting of recordings of lectures as well as online tests and examinations will be dealt with.

1. Introduction

The lockdown due to Covid-19 in South Africa resulted in rapid forced changes to the teaching approach of higher education institutions (HEIs). This chapter will focus on the seminars of lecturing to first-year Law of Persons and Family students during the pandemic. The difference in pedagogical approaches in the subject pre- and post-Covid-19 lockdown, drawing on a decade of lecturing the Law of Persons and the Family at the University of Johannesburg, will be discussed. A question that is explored is: To what extent did the change in the pedagogical approach,

due to the Covid-19 pandemic, work for first-year students? To examine this question, literature from education experts will be briefly examined as well as the lived experience of lecturers and students with regards to the subject Law of Persons and the Family, as presented at the University of Johannesburg during the Covid-19 lockdown and before such lockdown. Additional aspects that will be explored include the support provided to first-year students, the use of technology in the learning sphere during the Covid-19 pandemic, the opinions of education specialists about the pedagogical approaches used during the Covid-19 lockdown, and lastly the challenges faced by lecturers and students during the change in pedagogical approaches during the lockdown. The focus here will be on the subject Law of Persons and the Family as presented at the University of Johannesburg, and it will not be overly comparative in nature. Under the first aspect, the supportive role played by the lecturers and tutors in the Law of Persons and the Family will be examined. This will also link with the role played by technology to some extent, for example the role that WhatsApp groups played in supporting first-year students in the Law of Persons and the Family will be dealt with.

The Covid-19 lockdown affected the running of HEIs worldwide and had an impact on students' lives.² Students were concerned about whether they would be able to complete their degrees.³ Many students had to self-isolate when ill or had to undergo quarantine when entering the country where they were studying.⁴ When students returned to campus, measures were in place such as the use of face coverings in public, the use of sanitising hand gel, and more frequent cleaning of HEIs,⁵ as was the case at the University of Johannesburg. Students who started studying during lockdown found it harder to meet new

2 Lakhotnik, Volkava, Jiang and Yahiaoui *et al* "The perceived impact of covid-19 on student well-being and the mediating role of the university support: evidence from France, Germany, Russia and the UK" 2021 *Frontiers in Psychology* www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.642689/f (13-10-2022).

3 Lakhotnik, Volkava, Jiang, Yahiaoui *et al* (n 1).

4 See Lane "Life as a First Year Student During COVID-19" 2022 www.topuniversities.com/student-info/health-support/life-first-year-student-during-covid-19 (13-10-2022).

5 Lane (n 3).

people while at university and they experienced challenges to their mental health and found it more difficult to access support services than when being on campus.⁶ Student wellbeing has been found to be of vital importance to the success of students at tertiary institutions.⁷

The Covid-19 lockdown created a crisis in education, not only at the primary and high school level but also at the tertiary level.⁸ Krull and De Klerk refer to the period from 2020 to 2021 as “emergency remote teaching and learning”.⁹ It was estimated in 2020 that there was a possibility of 23.8 million learners – from primary education level to tertiary education level – dropping out of school or not accessing education and that closing in-person education affected the ability of parents to work, the availability of food for children and youth, and the increased possibility of children or youth being exposed to violence.¹⁰ Additionally, due to the lockdown, girls in particular had increased responsibility for domestic chores.¹¹

6 See further Lane (n 3) for a discussion of these challenges and Jin, Lee and Shium “First-year college student life seminars during Covid-19 in South Korea” 2021 *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 9895 www.nobinlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8471781/ (13-10-2022), where students expressed that they experienced difficulties but that they tried to cope, and 15.57% of students indicated that they were giving up on college life being as they had imagined.

7 Lakhotnik, Volkava, Jiang and Yahiaoui *et al* (n 1).

8 The United Nations “Policy Brief: Education During Covid-19 and Beyond” 2020 2 notes that “[t]he crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youth, and adults – those living in poor or rural areas, girls, refugees, persons with disabilities and forcibly displaced persons – to continue their learning”.

9 Krull and De Klerk “Online Teaching and Learning: Towards a Realistic View of the Future” 2021 <https://www.wits.ac.za/covid19/covid19news/latest/online-teaching-and-learning-towards-a-realistic-view-of-the-future.htm> (14-03-2023).

10 United Nations Policy Brief (n 7) 2. For a discussion of domestic violence during Covid-19, see Boniface “The impact of Covid-19 on domestic violence in South Africa” in Watney (ed) *The Impact of Covid-19 on Domestic Violence in South Africa* (2022) 199.

11 United Nations Policy Brief (n 7) 8. Some of the female students in my Law of Persons and the Family class reported that they had to take care of their siblings and perform household chores, so they could only study at night. See also n 24 (below).

2. Comparison between pre- and post-Covid-19 pedagogical approaches

During the Covid-19 lockdown, there was a changeover from in-person learning to online-only (remote or distance) learning. This situation was similar at many tertiary institutions around the world where this rapid transition to remote learning took place.¹² Most academics at HEIs were trained or had already been trained in the technology of online teaching systems used for distance learning, however not all students at all HEIs were properly trained in such systems before the Covid-19 lockdown occurred.¹³ At the University of Johannesburg, academic staff had already been using the online learning system for some learning activities and had previously received training on operating the system and additional training was also provided shortly before the lockdown occurred.¹⁴ A challenge experienced during this rapid change from in-person learning to remote learning was that lecturers had to “encourage and shepherd students through these very difficult transitions and help them persevere through the pandemic”.¹⁵ Even with in-person learning, first-year students require guidance and encouragement to complete their course, and they need the tenacity to keep going and finish their studies. Support for this increased need for shepherding was required during the lockdown period. The support system traditionally offered to first-year Law of Persons and the Family students was predominantly in person, with a smaller measure of online resources. This included an in-person orientation for all first-year students (across subjects).

There were some successes of pedagogical approaches and measures used during the lockdown period; for example, WhatsApp groups were carried through to the subsequent post-lockdown year (2023) and are now used for each tutorial group. Aspects such as frequent online chat forums, messaging via

12 Neuwirth, Jovic’ and Mukherji “Reimagining higher education during and post Covid-19: Challenges and opportunities” 2021 *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* 141 141.

13 Neuwirth *et al* (n 11) 141.

14 This is known as Blackboard, found on Ulink.

15 Neuwirth *et al* (n 11) 155.

WhatsApp groups, online tutorials and lectures, and the posting of recordings of lectures and tutorials as well as online tests, assignments, and examinations were used to present the subject Law of Persons and the Family during the lockdown. Legal information researching, the use of technology, legal writing, argumentation and factual analysis skills as well as team-building skills are all important skills for students learning law and still needed to be incorporated into the presentation of the subject during lockdown.¹⁶ During the Law of Persons and the Family class students researched online, making use of the library¹⁷ at the university as well as other online resources, and wrote assignments based on this research. The skills acquired while doing so included information researching, the use of technology, legal writing, factual analysis, and team-building skills. Due to the pandemic, students could not undertake in-person group work assignments as they had in the past; thus that method of team-building was not available for learning and teaching purposes. Instead, the students were formed into online groups for tutorials, had small video tutorials together, attended the larger lectures, and were part of a WhatsApp group for each tutorial group. We also made use of online chat forums where all students could participate and feel that they were part of the group and where students who read the questions and answers on the forums could benefit by acquiring knowledge of the answers to questions that other students posted. These methods of learning were not perfect methods of teamwork or team-building, but they did assist in trying to make students part of a group in the smaller sense of a tutorial group and in the larger sense of the class subject group.

16 Srichaiyarat and Lao-Amata “Legal Education During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Seminar of a Thai Law School” 2020 *Asian Journal of Legal Education* 228 228–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2322005820935753> (15-10-2022).

17 University of Johannesburg “Annual Report on Academic Teaching and Learning” 2021 284 notes that the Law Library appointed ten library assistants and a library law mentor to assist undergraduate law students in 2021.

Some teaching practices – relying on Kolb’s learning theory,¹⁸ John Dewey’s theory,¹⁹ Jack Mezirow’s transformative learning theory,²⁰ and Jean Piaget’s theory²¹ – were effective for success during the Covid-19 pandemic.²² Some of these teaching practices²³ included reframing virtual spaces through an online repository of knowledge, using reflective thinking as a pedagogical approach, reinforcing resilience by means of conflict resolution and meaningful participation, using inquiry-based and purposeful learning, and having useful apps to reach out to the community involved in the learning. Many of these methods were included in the pedagogical approach taken in presenting

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- 18 See Raschick, Maypole and Day “Improving field education through Kolb learning theory” 1998 (2014) *Journal of Social Work Education* <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10437797.1998.10778903> (15-10-2022) and Chan “Exploring an experiential learning project through Kolb’s learning theory using a qualitative research method” 2012 *European Journal of Engineering Education* 1-24.
- 19 Teach Thought Staff “John Dewey’s pedagogy: A summary” n.d. www.teachthought.com/learning/pedagogy-john-dewey-summary/#:~:text=Put%20briefly%2C%20Dewey,%20believed%20that,that%20is%2C [URL inactive] (15-10-2022) notes that learning is socially constructed and that students – rather than curriculum – should be at the centre of learning. See further Alexander *John Dewey’s theory of art, seminar and nature: The Horizon of feeling* (2012).
- 20 Western Governors University “What is the transformative learning theory” 2020 <https://www.wgdu.edu/blog/what-transformative-learning-theory2007.html#openSubscriberModal> (15-10-2022) notes that this theory focuses on instrumental and communicative learning. Instrumental learning consists of task-oriented problem-solving and communicative learning focuses on how people communicate their needs and feelings. See further Mezirow “Transformative learning theory” in Illeris (ed) *Contemporary theories of learning* (2018).
- 21 McLeod “Piaget’s stages of cognitive development: background and concepts of Piaget’s theory” 2022 www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html#:~:text=Jean%20Piaget%20theory%20of%20cognitive,mental%20model%20of%20the%20world (15-10-2022). This theory focuses more on children and that intelligence will change as a child grows and that a child has to develop a mental model of the world.
- 22 Chaturvedi, Purohit and Verma “Effective teaching practices for success during Covid 19 pandemic: towards phygital learning” *Frontiers of Education* 2021 <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/educ.2021.646557/full> (16-10-2022).
- 23 This study was performed in a business school in India, but the methods can be used in other HEIs as well.

the Law of Persons and the Family course online during the lockdown period. Students of the course had a comprehensive study guide and an e-textbook available online for the subject as well as access to the University library in digital format. Students thus not only had the required repository of knowledge for studying the course material, but also had access to materials for assignments and further learning. Students were encouraged to make use of reflective thinking in discussion forums, during tutorials, and during online lectures. For example, a question was asked about one of the topics dealt with in class and then students were given time to research and think about the answer and give feedback. Meaningful participation of students was encouraged and facilitated through discussion forums, WhatsApp groups, and online lectures and tutorials, despite the restrictions due to the lockdown.

The learning philosophy of the University of Johannesburg, “Learning to be”, includes preparing students for a world of technology,²⁴ so the university enabled students to use technology through the provision of data, and students could apply for assistance to purchase electronic devices if needed. The Department of Higher Education and Training reported that 77% of students in South Africa had modules that moved to remote learning and that 96% of respondents owned an electronic device and of these 89% owned a smartphone that they used for remote learning.²⁵

The “Learning to be” teaching philosophy is of particular importance when teaching future lawyers. In the teaching of first-year law students, we teach them how to approach and study the subject Law of Persons and the Family, and we teach them skills such as research, writing, and the reading and summarising of case law. These skills are also taught in a first-semester course, Legal Skills, but need to be applied to each law subject that the law student encounters during their studies. The Law of Persons and the Family is the first proper theoretical law subject that law students encounter during their studies. Thus, it provides the

24 See further University of Johannesburg “Learning to be” 2011 [https://news.uj.ac.za/news/learning-to-be-2/\(13-10-2022\)](https://news.uj.ac.za/news/learning-to-be-2/(13-10-2022)).

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perfect opportunity to combine the theory learnt in the Law of Persons and the Family with practical skills such as researching and writing.

The success of the measures implemented during the lockdown is reflected in the good success rate for the subject Law of Persons and the Family.²⁶ The use of WhatsApp groups, chat forums, online lecturers and tutorials all contributed to students mastering the subject despite the distance of online learning. The success of the methodology used in the subject will be discussed below.²⁷

3. Lived experience of the lecturer

Having only taught in-person classes, using tools such as slide shows and information posted online before the Covid-19 lockdown, lecturers had to transition from in-person lectures to online lectures. Although the classes provided prior to the lockdown were a far cry from the “chalk and talk” lectures of many years prior, they still contained a significant in-class component and in-class interactive element. Prior to the lockdown, we had taught all classes in person; these classes were often interactive and included group activities, where the tutors²⁸ assisted in class when needed, and class discussions. Students also sometimes made presentations in class based on their assignments. All of these in-person classes were large classes with on average 400 to 500 students per class. A large number of students would prove challenging when moving to an online-only environment during the lockdown. Previously, students could consult in person with their lecturers and tutors, but in-person consultation was

26 87% overall success rate in 2021.

27 At para 3 and para 4 below.

28 “The University of Johannesburg’s Tutor Training Programme has received international accreditation from the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) for 2021-2024. The University of Johannesburg is the first institution in South Africa to receive CRLA accreditation and accreditation for all three levels of training in one year”. University of Johannesburg *Annual Report Academic Teaching and Learning* (2021) 198. Tutors for the Law of Persons and the Family attend the yearly tutor training at the University of Johannesburg.

no longer possible during the lockdown.²⁹ Students also could no longer consult with their lecturers in person before or after class. To alleviate this problem, we made use of the chat forums that we monitored after every online class, in addition to email. Tutors also had Zoom tutorials so students could see their tutors, although online.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, consultations with students took place online via internet chat forums and emails. Classes were offered in video format,³⁰ and were recorded in case the students were not able to attend so that they could watch them later. Due to students not being able to see me before or after class during the lockdown, we used a chat forum for each topic dealt with during the lectures that students could access before and after classes. These forums were manned by the lecturers and tutors for the subject. The importance of having a team that could collaborate on efforts to support the students became increasingly evident during the lockdown.³¹ Due to having to use the large class video lecture format meant that we could not see students during lectures, and students had to make use of the in-lecture chat function if wanting to ask questions during the lecture. To

29 Potra, Pugna, Pop, Negrea and Dungan “Facing Covid-19 challenges: 1st-Year students’ Seminar within the Romanian Higher Educational System” 2021 www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC800192/ (13-10-2022). Face-to-face lectures help students be more attentive during lectures, and the lack of face-to-face lectures can leave students feeling isolated.

30 These videos were one-way only; due to the larger class mode having to be enabled so that students could all enter the virtual room together, only the lecturer was visible. A study by Bashir, Bashir, Rana, Lambert and Vernallis “Post-Covid-19 adaptations the shifts towards online learning, hybrid course delivery and the implications for biosciences courses in the higher education setting” 2021 *Frontiers in Education* frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/educ.2021.7116191f (11-10-2022) found that only half of the students were comfortable using video cameras, although they wanted interaction with lecturers.

31 Du Plessis, Jansen Van Vuuren, Simons, Frantz, Roman and Andipation “South African higher education institutions at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic: sense-making and lessons learnt” 2022 *Frontiers in Education* frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/educ.2021.740016/fu (11-10-2022) make it clear that one of the lessons learnt from the Covid-19 lockdown is the significance of collaboration and team efforts in education.

encourage students to use the function, we would ask questions in class or give small things to research during class, and that got more students involved and using the chat function. It was difficult to gauge whether students were keeping up with the lecture as we could not see their faces for immediate feedback and had to use text communication. We also could not see students at the office for consultations; in the past in-person consultation was used for individual questions from students and feedback to students when they had queries. Students also would at times ask for guidance regarding personal issues and then the opportunity could be used to refer students to the relevant support services. During the Covid-19 lockdown, text-based communication with students could feel impersonal and distanced at times. In order to get students to participate in communication more often, we also implemented WhatsApp chat groups with the tutors, where each tutor had a group for their tutorial class. Tutorials also took place over Zoom, where interaction could occur within a small class environment. The discussion forums were also used on Blackboard on Ulink; for each section of work, a discussion forum was opened where students could leave questions and have discussions with the lecturers. These forums were utilised regularly by the students, and the advantage was that users of the forums could access questions that were asked by other users as well as the answers to those questions.

Assessments that took place during the Covid-19 lockdown were open-book assessments. These assessments took the form of small online tests, larger semester tests, an exam, as well as weekly tutorial activities. Additionally, students received a written assignment for each semester that they needed to complete based on their individual research. Prior to the lockdown, one assignment per year was a group work assignment and one assignment was an individual written assignment, but during the lockdown, this was replaced with individual assignments.

The feedback that we received from the students as well as the tutors was positive with regard to the tutorials and WhatsApp chat groups. The positives we experienced with remote teaching were that we did not have to spend time to get to the office or lecture venue, and that the time saved could be used to

communicate with students, perform administrative tasks, and conduct research. Some of the negatives experienced during the switch to online teaching – particularly during the initial phases of the lockdown – were the difficulties that some students felt when they had to transition from in-person lecturing to online lectures. Students also had connectivity issues, and the lack of sufficient data was a problem.³² The University of Johannesburg arranged to provide students with data. Still, some students did report to the lecturers or tutors that, due to living in very remote areas, they had to travel to be able to use the data and connect to a network. We needed to consider student demographics and whether there was digital equity when deciding to use online teaching approaches,³³ so we recorded lectures and tutorials so that students could access these at a later time if they were unable to attend the live tutorial or lectures, and tutorial marks were given based on the tutorial assignments that were sent to the tutors – not on whether students attended the live online tutorial in person.

4. Student evaluation of the subject and the first-year seminar

The First Year Seminar (FYS) plays an important role in orientating first-year law students to university life,³⁴ the support services offered at the University of Johannesburg, and the functioning and support offered by the Law Faculty to first-year students.³⁵ During the FYS, the tutors also play a large role in helping orientate the students and are supported by First-Year lecturers who are

32 See the discussion below on the undergraduate student survey at the University of Johannesburg in par 4.

33 See further Bashir *et al* (n 28) 1, 3 for a discussion of this aspect, and Dlamini and Naidoo “First-year student Seminar – using digital media for teaching and learning amid Covid-19 pandemic at a rural-based campus” 2022 *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 195 195 for a discussion of the seminar of first-year students during the Covid-19 pandemic at the University of Zululand and an exploration of the disparities caused by the move to digital learning.

34 Also known as the First Year Seminar (FYE). Different names have been used for this programme throughout the years.

35 The author has been the chairperson of the FYE at the Faculty of Law for several years.

involved in the year-long organisation of the FYS. The FYS was originally in-person but moved to an online-only format during the lockdown period. The online orientation was not limited to only a few days; instead, resources were kept up and added to online for students throughout the year. At the time of writing this chapter, we are planning the FYS for 2023 to be in-person, but we are also to have a large online component to support students in their journey to campus life. In order to get students to engage with the online materials, small tests were put online, and students were asked questions about the materials.³⁶ The online orientation materials supported students throughout the year. The FYS is very important as it helps students to transition from school to their first year of studying at a tertiary level.³⁷ The effective design of the content of the FYS is important.³⁸ Access to resources is important to help students transition to university and the FYS provides this access. Still, students indicate that face-to-face interaction helps them transition better to university.³⁹

In this section, the results of the undergraduate seminar survey for the Faculty of Law will be explored, and the student evaluation module and teaching evaluation reports will be examined. The University of Johannesburg Undergraduate Student Survey – Faculty of Law,⁴⁰ was conducted for all year groups of undergraduate students across the Faculty of Law. Of the students who took part in this voluntary survey for the Faculty of Law, the greatest response rate received was 46% for the first-year students.⁴¹ The majority of overall undergraduate respondents (92.1%) indicated that the learning content was

36 These were arranged by the assistant lecturer Louis Koen at the Faculty of Law. He is also an active committee member of the FYE organising committee.

37 Herkulaars and Oosthuizen “First-Year student transition at the University of the Free State during Covid 19: Challenges and Insights” 2021 *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 31 31 [www.ajol.info/index.php/jssa/article/view/206131/ \(13-10-2022\)](http://www.ajol.info/index.php/jssa/article/view/206131/13-10-2022).

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 University of Johannesburg “Division for Institutional Planning, Evaluation and Monitoring” 2021 (hereafter “UJ’s DIPEM”).

41 UJ’s DIPEM (n 38) 6.

easily accessible on Blackboard.⁴² A large proportion (91.2%) of the students who responded indicated that the learning content was well structured and 89.3% stated that the learning content for all their undergraduate modules was up to date.⁴³ Many (87.5%) of students who responded concluded that the recording of their online lectures was accessible and 78.7% indicated that it was easy to join their live online lectures, whereas 21.3% of respondents said they did not find it easy to join online lectures.⁴⁴ Some students felt that they did not have enough online contact with their lecturers.⁴⁵ Overall, students who responded were satisfied with how the online learning took place, 84.5% of whom stated that their lecturers were good at explaining things via the online platform, and 83.7% of whom noted that the lecturers used different online methods to engage with them.⁴⁶ The motivation that students received from lecturers was also indicated as being good, in that 83.7% of respondents reported that their lecturers motivated them to do their best.⁴⁷ Some students (37.5%) indicated that they preferred recorded lectures as they could replay these and that they studied after midnight so that they could use night-time data (which is cheaper) and so that they could take notes easily.⁴⁸ When students in 2021 who took part in the survey were asked what teaching and learning methods they would prefer for the future, 15.2% indicated that they would prefer purely online teaching and learning methods, 20% indicated that they would prefer purely contact lectures, and 64.8% stated that they would prefer a mixture of contact and online lectures.⁴⁹ When questioned about assessments, 82.7% of the undergraduate respondents indicated that the number of assessments was adequate.⁵⁰

42 UJ's DIPEM (n 38) 8. Blackboard is the online learning platform found on Ulink at the University of Johannesburg.

43 UJ's DIPEM (n 38) 8.

44 *Ibid.*

45 31.5%, according to UJ's DIPEM (n 38) 9.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

48 UJ's DIPEM (n 38) 10.

49 *Ibid.*

50 UJ's DIPEM (n 38) 11.

The University of Johannesburg's Annual Report on Academic Teaching and Learning⁵¹ indicated that the overall quality of teaching and learning improved and the module success rate for 2020 was 89.2% and the module success rate for 2021 was 87.5%. Data indicated that 83% of first-year students had accessed the First Year Experience (previously the First Year Seminar) modules that were online during the Covid pandemic, from January to April 2021.⁵² Preparation for the FYS for 2022 started already in 2021 and was co-ordinated by the FYS Office at the University of Johannesburg, and the author was the chairperson of the Law Faculties First-Year Seminar Committee during this time.⁵³ In 2021, the Centre for Academic Technologies (CAT) at the University of Johannesburg prepared first-year students for the online learning that was going to take place during the year. This was done by providing a University of Johannesburg Online Toolkit module and a Learning with Technology module for the first-year students.⁵⁴ The 2021 year was also successful academically for the Faculty of Law at the University of Johannesburg as the success rate in the undergraduate law modules was reported as 90% and in 2020 it was 86%, and the undergraduate satisfaction rate in the Faculty of Law was 90%.⁵⁵

5. Conclusion

The upheaval caused to the academic learning process by the Covid-19 lockdown and the rapid transition to online learning was challenging to both students and staff; however, some positive lessons were learnt from this challenge. The importance of having a good team to support first-year students was made even clearer during the change to online learning. Providing support to first-year students has always been important and helped students achieve success in their studies, and the University of Johannesburg has provided this support to first-year law

51 University of Johannesburg "Annual Report on Academic Teaching and Learning" 2021 197 (hereafter "UJ Annual Report").

52 UJ Annual Report (n 49) 184.

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*

55 UJ Annual Report (n 49) 278, 280.

students both before and during the Covid-19 lockdown. The role of the FYS in orientating and supporting students can also not be underestimated. Support provided to students helps them succeed in their first-year studies and complete their degrees. HEIs should see the student as a whole being needing not only academic support but also emotional and psychological support as well as physical support (such as housing, food, and medical care), contribute to the student succeeding in their studies. Students studying the Law of Persons and the Family at the University of Johannesburg during the Covid-19 lockdown benefited from the online discussion forums, tutorial WhatsApp groups, as well as video lectures and tutorials. The approach to learning a subject online can never be the same as learning a subject in-person, but due to the dedication and teamwork of the academic staff for the Law of Persons and the Family, students were successful in their online studies and many of the initiatives – such as WhatsApp groups – have been carried over to post-lockdown, in-person learning. This chapter has shown that the lived approach of teaching a first-year law subject during the lockdown period was very different to in-person lecturing but that, as academics, we had the necessary skills and training to transition to online learning to the benefit of our students. The important role that support services play at a university for first-year students was also made abundantly clear. Covid-19 provided challenges to learning, but we met those challenges and shepherded our students through to the second year of their law studies.